

INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES

329

A Queer Little Eskimo

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Grace Barrier.

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By **EVA MAYNE**



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A Queer Little Eskimo

A QUEER LITTLE ESKIMO

AN ESKIMO BABY

Itka is a queer, dear little baby.
His skin is dark and shiny.

Mother soon comes to give him a
bath.

She uses no water. Oh, no; it
is too scarce.

She rubs him all over with whale
oil. That is the only kind of bath
Itka has ever had.

Now Mother comes with some
playthings for Itka. She gives him
his father's hatchet and snow-stick.
The hatchet is made of bone.

The snow-stick is to hit the dogs with when they try to come into the house.

Other playthings are little toys made of bone.

You would never guess where



Itka's Home

Itka's cradle is. It is a deep hood on his mother's back.

Here he is snug and warm.

Mother has another hood which

she draws up over her head. All her clothes are made of fur.

She wishes to visit a friend, so off she goes through the snow. Itka cuddles down in his furry bed and has a fine ride.

Soon he gets cold and cries. Then his mother takes him out of his cradle.

She puts him under her clothes, next to her bare back. Strings of skin hold him there.

Now he is warm again, and falls asleep.

His mother carries him this way everywhere she goes. She loves him just as any mother loves her baby.

WHERE ITKA LIVES

Eskimo Land is a very queer place.

It is very, very cold. Everything is white with snow.

The ice is piled up as high as mountains.

Up there the days and nights are not like ours.

The sun shines day and night for four or five months. Then it is dark for the same length of time.

It is like having one long day and one long night in a year. But no one stays at home all the time when the sun is not shining.

The stars are very bright at times. Itka's father goes hunting, but does

not go far from home during this season.

The dark time is the Eskimo's winter.

The snow is five or six feet deep. The deer dig with their hoofs for



Polar Bear

the dry moss underneath the snow.

The bears and seals have gone to sleep.

But at least one beautiful thing comes in this cold, dark time.

Night after night bright lights show in the sky. They seem to shoot up from the sky line. These are the Northern Lights.

Sometimes they are in red, yellow and blue stripes. At other times the sky is a bright red.

When the sun begins to shine again, Itka's mother says, "Summer is coming."

The Eskimo's summer is colder than our winter.

The snow melts in some places, and brown grass grows here and there. A few little flowers sometimes come up through the snow.

A few birds are seen, and the bears and seals wake up.

The sun shines day and night.

The ice and snow sparkle, and the Eskimos are happy.

HOW FATHER BUILT A HOUSE

“Come, children,” says Itka’s father, “we must have a new house.” So the children all go out to help him.

Big Brother can do as much as Father, and all the others can do a little.

Where will they get the things to build with? They have no wood or stone.

They know what to use. Big blocks of snow look much like stones, and in this cold land they do not melt.

They cost nothing but the work of cutting them.

Father cuts the blocks with his big knife. Big Brother helps to put them in place.

They draw a circle as large around as they wish the house to be. Then they pile up the snow blocks in the shape of a half circle.

Now the children are able to help, too.

They fill all the cracks with loose snow. Then they throw snow all over the house.

Sometimes it is two or three feet deep. It keeps out the cold winds.

What fun the children have!

All children like to build snow houses. These Eskimo children are building a real one. It is to be their home.

For a door they cut a small hole. It is just big enough to crawl through.

Around this doorway a tiny snow house is built. It is a kind of hall.

It would seem queer to us to have to crawl into a house, but that is just what the Eskimos do.

When they go in, they pull their hoods up over their heads, so as not to get snow down their necks.

Now they go inside, carrying great blocks of snow.

These they use to build their



The House That Itka's Father Built

beds. They put them on one side along the wall.

Here they sleep at night and sit in the daytime. They have no other beds or chairs.

Mother comes in, with Itka in his cradle.

She throws many thick skins on the new bed. Then she puts Itka down on the bed.

Soon she brings in the stove.

The stove is a flat stone, hollowed out on top.

Along the edge is a bunch of dried moss. In the hollow is whale fat.

The moss burns like a wick in an oil lamp.

The strange stove gives the family all the heat and light that they have.

The house is never any warmer than is our outdoors in winter.

Big Brother carries in a block of ice, which he melts for drinking

water. The ice drips down, drop by drop, into a leather pail.

Now the house is done and they all come in and rest.

Mother gives them a good supper.

It has not taken long to build their new house.

You may think it is not a very good one, but Itka and his brothers like it. They know no other kind, and so are happy living in it.

ITKA'S NEW SUIT

One day, when Itka has grown to be about a year old, Mother says, "Itka must have a new suit."

“Very well,” says Father, “I will see about it.”

He does not go to the store to get it. There is no store where he lives.

Where do you suppose he gets clothes for his little boy?

Father knows where to go.

He puts on his warmest fur suit and takes his bow and arrows. Off he goes to hunt for a reindeer.

At last he comes home with a deer and a seal.

The children are glad when they see him coming. Now they can have a feast of deer meat and seal soup.

Mother skins the deer and the

seal that Father has brought, and cooks some of the meat for supper.

The skins she stretches out to dry. There they lie for a week.

Then she scrapes and scrapes them with a knife until they are as soft as velvet.

One day she cuts from them a suit for Itka. She has no scissors, so she uses a big knife.

It is the same knife which she used to scrape the skins with, and to cut up her meat.

First, she makes a little pair of trousers of deerskin, with the fur side in.

Then she cuts out another pair of trousers to be worn over the first

pair. These have the fur on the outside.

She makes two warm coats for Itka in the same way.



The outside one has a hood on the back. This is for Itka to draw up when he goes outdoors.

The coats have no buttons. Itka's mother puts them on over his head like a sweater.

Big Brother next goes hunting, and brings home some

Itka in His New Suit

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eider ducks. They have a soft down under their feathers.

The skin with the down on makes lovely socks for Itka's little feet. Over the socks he must have boots of sealskin.

It is hard work for Mother to make this suit.

She sews it with cords of skin and makes the seams so tight that no water can get in.

Itka's mother makes the clothes for all the family. They are all made much alike.

Mother wears trousers, too. They are the best thing to wear when there is so much snow.

When Itka's suit is done, he no

An Eskimo Family



longer rides in his cradle. He runs about by himself.

Very cunning he looks, too. You would say he was like a furry bear.

DINNER TIME

Little Itka is crying softly. He does not wish Father to hear him.

Father would say he was not brave. He would tell him to smile.

What can be the matter? Poor little fellow, he is hungry!

For two days he has had nothing to eat. How would you like that? Would you cry softly?

Mother comes in. She has in her hand a piece of dried skin.

This she gives to Itka. He stops crying and chews the skin.

It is winter time. Outside is darkness.

When the stars come out, Father and big Brother start away. They must find food, or the family will starve.

They are gone a long time. Poor little Itka wishes they would come.

At last a glad shout is heard. The family creep out to see what it is about.

Here comes Father with a big deer over his shoulder, and brother with a bear on his sled. They have had good luck.

Then all the neighbors come in.

The deer and bear are skinned quickly.

Soup is made in a big kettle, and meat is cooked.

All sit on the floor or bed. There is no table. There are no dishes.

Everyone helps himself. They eat and eat.

Now Itka is happy again. When he can hold no more, he curls up on the bed and falls asleep.

The others keep on eating. They can go without food for a long time, but when they have it, they eat a great deal.

Much of their food they eat raw. There are no dishes to wash. What a very queer way to live!

PLAYMATES AND HELPERS

“Right! Left! Whoa!” cries Itka.

Is he playing horse? No, he never saw a horse. He is playing dog.

In Eskimo Land there are no horses. The people ride on sledges, and drive dogs.

The dogs are strong and can pull big loads. The Eskimos could not do without them.

One day Itka’s father brought him two little woolly pups for playmates.

Such sharp little noses they had! Itka loved them as soon as he saw them.

His mother made a harness for them.

Itka drove his little team every day. Around and around the room they went.



Itka's Dogs

He would play he had a sled. The snow-stick, or anything, would do to make believe with.

Soon his pets learned to know his voice. They would go where he told them. How proud he felt!

At night the dogs slept with Itka. They kept him warm.

But they grew faster than he did. When they were big dogs they could not stay in the house.

They did not mind this. Under their hair they had a thick woolly coat of fur.

When it was very cold, they could sleep in the hallway.

Big Brother drove them to his sled with other dogs. He took Itka riding with him.

Itka had watched his brother make this sled.

He had no wood or nails. He did not need them.

He took the jawbone of a whale for framework and runners. Over this he stretched sealskin. Then he coated the runners with ice.

This made a fine sled. He drove a dozen dogs hitched to it. How fast they went over the snow!

Sometimes Itka helped feed the dogs. They were always hungry, for they were fed only every other day.

The boys fed them long strips of whale's hide. The dogs would fight over it and try to take one another's dinner.

One boy had a long whip. With

this he kept off the dogs, while another boy fed one at a time.

Every year, Itka is given two dogs. When he is a big boy he will have enough to drive.

They are his playmates when they are little, and his best friends when they are grown.

FUN AND FROLIC

Itka is now a big boy. He is making himself a sled.

It is not hard to find what he needs to make it of. It is all about him. He uses nothing but ice.

First, he gets a nice block the right size. With a knife he shapes

the runners. It makes a fine sled.

Soon it is done, and away he goes for a coast.

Many other little boys are coasting, too. They are playing the game of reindeer hunting.

They have found all the reindeer antlers they can and have stuck them in the snow.

Now they start down the hill on their sleds.

As they pass the antlers, they shoot at them with their arrows. Some throw spears.

The game is to see who can hit the most antlers.

When Itka is tired of this game, he leaves his sled.

He thinks he will roll down hill.

He draws his knees up to his chin and clasps his hands around his ankles. Then he lets himself go. Away he rolls like a furry ball.

Sometimes the boys race in this way.

In the summer the boys play ball. But they have such a queer ball!

It is a round sealskin bag, half full of sand. It is much like a bean bag.

In this game they do not catch the ball. They slap it with their hands and keep it going as long as they can.

When Itka gets home, Mother is making something. Itka claps his

hands for joy, he is so happy to see what she is doing.

Can she be making candy? No, but Itka likes it as you like candy.

Father has brought home a bird called the dovekie. Mother takes out the bones. She fills the skin with reindeer fat, and lets it get hard.

This she gives to Itka. Oh, how good it is! How he eats it!

He likes seal blubber and marrow, too. This kind of food keeps him warm.

Itka and his friends have very few playthings. The girls have queer little dolls made of skins and dressed in furs.

One of Itka's toys is the noo-glook-took, or pin and cup ball.

On one end of a string is a bone ball full of holes. On the other end is a bone pin.

Itka holds the pin in his hand and throws the ball. He must catch the ball on the pin.

This is a hard game, but Itka can do it well.

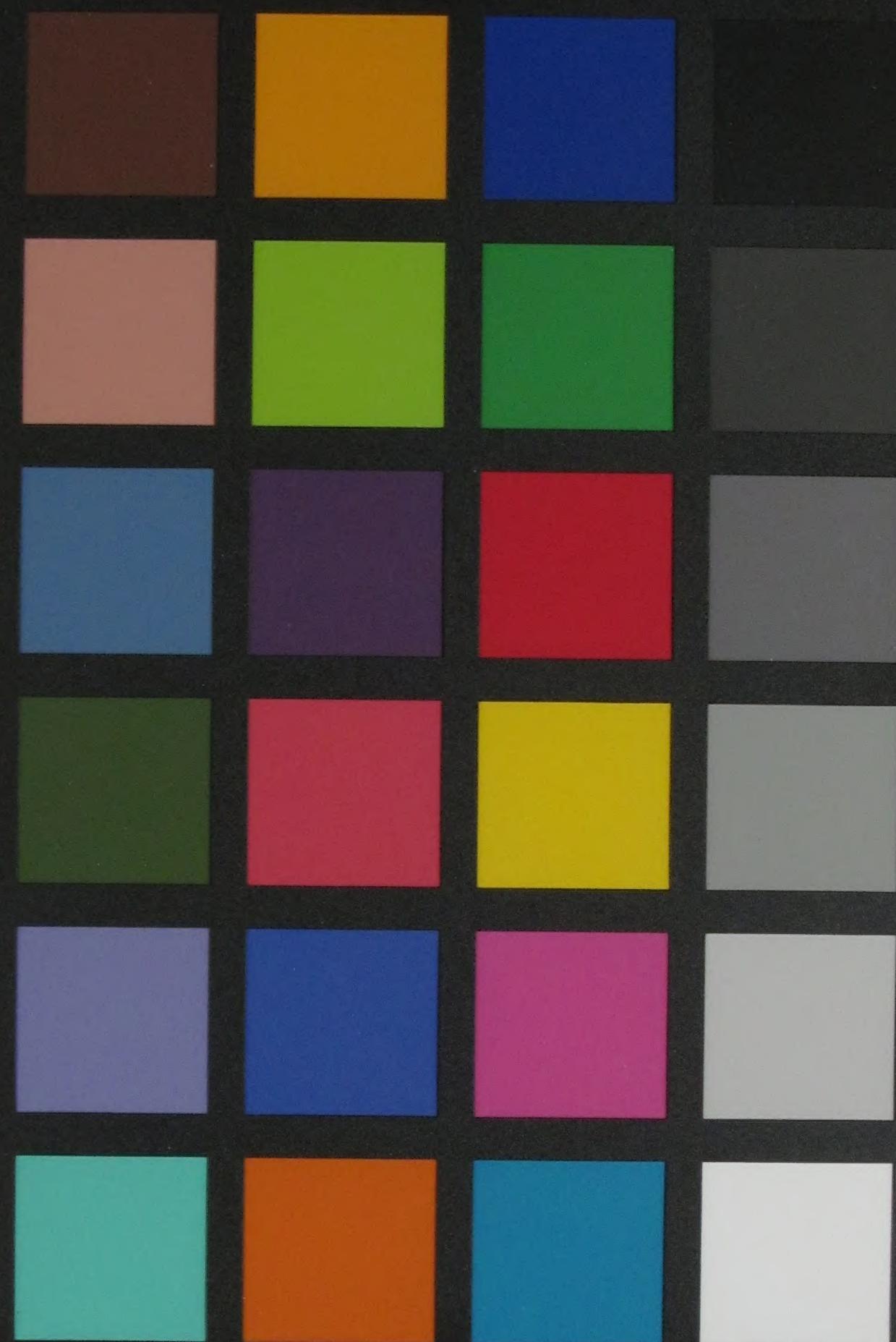
When he was still a little fellow, Mother taught him to play musk-ox-cup. For this she used a cup made from the horn of a musk-ox. It had a handle.

In the cup, Mother put some soup or a piece of meat. Then she whirled it around.

If it stopped with the handle next to Itka, he got what was in the cup. When Mother played with him, Itka got it every time. Can you guess why?

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